

From the author
AN
1609/5117.
EARNEST ADDRESS

TO THE

ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS

OF THE

CHURCH of ENGLAND,

FROM THE AUTHOR OF

“ CONSIDERATIONS UPON THE UNIVERSALITY AND
UNIFORMITY OF THE THEOCRACY.”

“ For now the Ax is laid to the Root of the Trees, and every
Tree that bringeth not forth good Fruit is hewn down.”

St. John the Baptist.

“ First cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye, and then shalt
thou see clearly to cast out the Moat out of thy Brother's Eye.”

Jesus Christ.

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MY LORDS,

THE *signs of the times* are too obvious to be misunderstood; the destruction of the Roman superstition in every country, where it is the dominant religion, either already is or soon will be effected. It was formerly, in all its antichristian idolatry and blasphemous assumption of divine powers, the religion of this country. The reformation happily rid us of many of its abominations; but it behoves your lordships, as the governors of the national church, to look well into our
B 2 creeds

creeds and ordinances, and *at this time* to consider, seriously, whether we still retain any of the *accursed thing*, which has called for the vengeance of the Almighty upon other nations. God forbid that I should disturb the quiet of the inferior orders of the clergy, by exposing the sophisms of Jortin or Paley, which may have reconciled them to the terms of their subscription. They have no power to help themselves, and cannot quit their profession without abandoning their subsistence. But with your lordships it is not so; you have seats in the supreme legislature of the realm, and can when you please amend that act of parliament (for it is only an act of parliament) which prescribes the mode, in which you are to exercise your high function. And yet (with the greatest reverence for your exalted characters I speak it) in no office of our church, is there to be found so much of that impious assumption of divine power
by



by the church of Rome, as in that of the ordination of priests and consecration of bishops. For what has the pope ever said more presumptuous, or in more impious assumption of the vicegerency of God; than in the taking upon him to forgive sins and to authorize others to forgive them likewise. Or what blasphemy has the pope ever uttered more abominable, than the directing the Holy Ghost to enter into such men as he thought fit to point out; and prescribing the mode of his divine operations? If attachment to system and ancient forms, would allow you to exercise your own excellent judgments in this matter, how would your hearts smite you, when you pronounced those awful words to the young candidate for priests orders; *receive the Holy Ghost, for the office and work of a priest: whose sins THOU dost forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins THOU dost retain they are retained.* And you would ask yourselves, as the Jews
asked

asked Christ, who can forgive sins but God only; and who can confer the Holy Ghost, but the Father and the Son, whose spirit he is, and from whom he proceeds? The declaration of Christ to Peter, on which the church of Rome formed their impious pretences to the keys of Heaven, and the power of remitting sins, has lately been most ably expounded by one of your body, the learned Bishop of Rochester, as far as respects the keys of heaven. But although every argument his lordship uses, to expose the futility of the Pope's claim to the keys of Heaven, under that declaration, is equally applicable to the claim of remitting sins; yet, (such is the power of system over the most enlightened minds), his lordship makes a distinction, and asserts Christ to have committed that power to his church throughout all ages. What his lordship means by the *church of Christ*, in this instance, is not easily to be collected; but
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if we are to understand that the power is committed to those who practise it, then your lordships *alone* and the Romish priests, form the church of Christ in this country; for there are none others who either forgive sins themselves, or authorize others to forgive them.

The dangers apprehended from a *reform*, (as it is idly called) in the constitution of parliament, have no foundation, when applied to what is properly termed a *reform* in any office of the church; for in the case of the parliament there is no complete system to revert to, no perfect model to copy after; as the present constitution has grown up out of a far more imperfect origin, has undergone many alterations and additions; and though some further beneficial ones may still be made, they cannot be of the nature of a *reform*, as that term implies a return to what has been before; but must be denominated

minated *improvements*, and as such liable to the hazard of failure, to which all human speculations are subject; and therefore not to be ventured upon without great necessity, and carried into execution with the utmost circumspection. But in our religious concerns, we have the most perfect model to copy after, and the instructions of the blessed author of our religion to direct us in the work. There is, therefore, no hazard of mistake, no speculation but sure and certain ground to proceed on: and more especially in respect to your lordship's high function, is there the clearest directions, and most shining examples. Consult the pastoral letters of St. Paul to the only bishops, (Timothy and Titus) to whom there is any proof that the Holy Ghost was ever given; and you will there find full and complete patterns to copy after. And surely it is highly presumptuous in any future pastor of Christ's flock, to assume powers and
 authorities

authorities which neither of those inspired bishops exercised. Ask yourselves, then, if there be any expression in those epistles, which can be tortured to confer a power to bestow the Holy Ghost, and to prescribe its operations, or to forgive sins? much less to authorize those ministers, whom they should ordain, to do either. I say *prescribe* to the Holy Ghost, the mode of his operations; because, when any priest, to whom you have thus given the Holy Ghost, is afterwards consecrated a bishop, you do not think his former inspiration, being only for the office and work of a priest, adequate to his new function; and, therefore, you, a *second time*, direct the Holy Ghost to enter into him for *another* purpose, viz. for the office and work of a bishop: and you remind him to stir up the *grace of God*, which is given him (in addition as it should seem to the gift of the Holy Ghost) by *the then imposition of your hands*.

There are, indeed, several instances recorded of the Holy Ghost inspiring persons, (that is, endowing them with the gifts of prophecy and of tongues, to enable them to preach the gospel in divers countries), on whom the apostles had laid their hands, as ordaining them for the ministry. And Simon, of Samaria, conceiving that by their laying on hands, they actually conferred those gifts, offered the apostles money to give him the like power. But Peter's answer is a full proof that they never assumed that power to themselves. Thy money, says he, perish with thee, because thou has thought the *gift of God* may be purchased with money. And the instances of the Holy Ghost, that is, the gift of tongues and of prophecy, being bestowed on persons; in the case of Cornelius, who had neither been baptised, or had the apostles hands laid upon them; is further evidence of the fact. I have diligently read the whole account of the apostles proceedings

ings after Christ's ascension, and after he had sent the Holy Ghost to illuminate them, and I have not found a single instance of any of them taking upon himself to forgive sins, or to direct the Holy Ghost to enter into any one. Whence then, may I ask, do your lordships derive this power, and after whose example do you exercise or authorize others to exercise it? Happily, indeed, your Protestant flock are so well acquainted with the scriptures, that they place no reliance upon the absolution of either priests or bishops, but look up to Christ only as their propitiation and mediator with the Father, from whom alone they hope for remission of their sins. And as it is only in the office of the visitation of the sick, that the priest is *required* to exercise this impious authority, with which he is more impiously told he is invested, of absolving sinners: the intire omission of the obnoxious words I have quoted, in the

ordination of a priest, would be attended with no inconvenience, or ever be complained of. For there is scarcely a curate in the kingdom, so little mindful of his own salvation, or so little careful of shocking the ears of any of his parishioners, as to pronounce those blasphemous words, appointed for him in the office of visitation of the sick, viz. “ *By his (Christ’s) authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins.*”

This omission, I presume, your lordships may make of yourselves, without any amendment of the act of uniformity, (as no court of law in the kingdom would say a priest’s ordination was incomplete, without those words were pronounced by the officiating bishop), and thereby relieve yourselves from the dreadful crime of so impious an assumption of divine power. But I am anxious on account of the nation, that the words should
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be directed to be omitted by act of parliament, as the means of averting the divine displeasure, for having made them a part of the religion of the state: and there is no time to be lost in doing it; for what avails our fastings and deprecations of the divine wrath, while we retain in our most sacred offices, the most abominable of those antichristian claims, which have so visibly wrought the destruction of the church of Rome. For your own sakes, therefore, for the sake of the ecclesiastical establishment, of which you are the governors, for the sake of the monarchy, which it is your duty to support, for the sake of our happy constitution, which is threatened to be subverted, for the sake of all the subjects of the realm, and for the sake of the whole Christian world, I implore your lordships to cast away this *accursed thing*, this foul garment of the Romish prostitute, this impious stamp of the beast, whose name is blasphemy.

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There are many other things in our articles, liturgy, and offices, which call loudly for amendment ; and which, agreeably to my declaration in my late publication, “ Considerations on the Universality and “ Uniformity of the Theocracy,” I shall point out at a less perturbed season, if indeed the good providence of the Almighty should permit such a season, to arrive. For however it may surprize and alarm your lordships, I am free to pledge myself, to prove to the conviction of all Christian men, that whoever diligently compares the Revelations, which God has made of himself by Moses, by the Prophets, and by his son Jesus Christ, and his Apostles ; with the articles, the creeds, the liturgy, and offices of the church of England, will be unable to form a notion of the Deity, *consistent with the whole*. Nor will he be able to satisfy himself, what is the precise notion of the Deity, which the church of England intends he should form.

form. And if we consider the events which are passing before our eyes, it will not appear presumptuous to expect, that the speedy reform of those abuses in our religious ordinances, which are so offensive to the Deity, and repugnant to his revealed will and our Christian profession, may be the means of turning away the divine wrath, and of our being suffered to continue in the enjoyment of our happy constitution, and the free exercise of our holy religion. Let me, then, intreat your lordships, to take this paper into your closets, and laying aside all political or systematical prejudices, all vain fears of the consequences of making any reform; consider that you are the ministers of a sovereign, who declared, *that his kingdom was not of this world*, and that his servants were not to conduct themselves by maxims of worldly policy. Dare to do right, and leave the event to his good providence; and if an example of the consequences of a contrary

trary conduct will be of any use, recollect the fate of the Order of Jesuits, whose *Superior*, Ricci, had been repeatedly advised, and earnestly intreated by the Pope, to attend to the representations made to him of the necessity of a reform; but who would condescend to give no other answer to the pontiff, than in these six Latin words: *Sint ut sunt aut non sint*. That your lordships may not, by adopting the same maxim, incur the like calamity, is the fervent prayer of a well wisher to the clerical hierarchy, as established by the apostles, a sincere Christian, and

A LAYMAN of the

CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

